

INTERVIEW WITH JIM GOETTL  
BY DOROTHE NORTON AUGUST 18, 2002  
PRIOR LAKE, MINNESOTA

MS. NORTON: I am glad to be able to see you again after all of the years we worked together and then hadn't seen each other. I am doing this interview now, for the National Conservation Training Center. They will put it in their archives. I'll ask you some questions and if there is every anything you don't want to answer, or can't remember; that's fine.

MR. GOETTL: Okay that sounds fine Dorothe.

MS. NORTON: What are your birthplace and the date?

MR. GOETTL: I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Jul7 27, 1930.

MS. NORTON: What were your parents' names?

MR. GOETTL: My mother was Jeanette Buckley. My Dad was Joseph Goettl.

MS. NORTON: What were their jobs and education?

MR. GOETTL: My Dad never went any further than the eighth grade. He was a heavy equipment mechanic. My mother went to college, but she never did work out. She was a stay-at-home mother.

MS. NORTON: Where and how did you spend your early years?

MR. GOETTL: I lived in the south side of Minneapolis. I grew up there. I went to a Catholic grade school. I went to St. Thomas for two years. Then I went to Central High School; where I graduated.

MS. NORTON: Were those schools all in Minneapolis?

MR. GOETTL: Yes.

MS. NORTON: When did you graduate?

MR. GOETTL: 1948.

MS. NORTON: Were there any hobbies or books or events that influenced you the most as a child?

MR. GOETTL: I can't really think of anything too much that influenced me. I never really knew what I was going to do.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have any jobs when you were a child?

MR. GOETTL: I worked when I was going to school at Dayton's. I worked for fifty cents an hour as a stock boy.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever hunt or fish?

MR. GOETTL: I did a lot of hunting and fishing, especially fishing. My dad was quite a fisherman. My dad didn't hunt, but there were a lot of friends of mine who did. So I got to hunt with them. We grew up hunting and fishing all of our lives.

MS. NORTON: When you graduated high school, what university did you attend?

MR. GOETTL: I didn't go the University of Minnesota except for night school. Back in those days, I was a land surveyor and they didn't really have a course for that; it was only night school that you could go to. I took the night school courses.

MS. NORTON: What aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future?

MR. GOETTL: My education had nothing to do with becoming a land surveyor. There is kind of a story to it. When I got ready to get married, I asked for some time off to get married. The fellow I was working for wouldn't give me any time off, so I quit. When we came back from our honeymoon we were living down in the cities on 38<sup>th</sup> and Grand. In them days you only had one car and my wife was working. There was a land surveying office about four blocks away, which was hiring. When I got back from the honeymoon, I went down there on a Monday morning and told them I was looking for a job. They hired me and I started my land-surveying career. I surveyed for forty years after that.

MS. NORTON: That's good! Did you serve in any branches of the military service?

MR. GOETTL: Yes, I was in the Army. I went in 1950. I got drafted during the Korean War.

MS. NORTON: How long were you in?

MR. GOETTL: I was in for twenty-one months. I spent thirteen months in Korea.

MS. NORTON: What were your other duty stations; basic training and things?

MR. GOETTL: I had basic training down in Georgia. Then I went to a jump school in Georgia. From there I went to ranger training. After that I went overseas with the ranger airborne.

MS. NORTON: Did you get any decorations while you were in the military?

MR. GOETTL: No, just the regular ribbons for combat. That's about all.

MS. NORTON: What was your job then, in the Army?

MR. GOETTL: I was an infantryman. Just a soldier.

MS. NORTON: Did your military service relate in any way to your employment with FWS?

MR. GOETTL: No it didn't have anything to do with that.

MS. NORTON: When, where and how did you meet Marilyn?

MR. GOETTL: When I came home from the service, which was in November of 1952 I was in a little bar down on 26<sup>th</sup> and Hinnipin Avenue. My friend and I met two young ladies in there one of them happened to become my wife. We married the following May.

MS. NORTON: Where were you married?

MR. GOETTL: In Melrose, Minnesota. That's where she was from. We married on May 2, 1953.

MS. NORTON: You said you had eight children. Can you tell me their names?

MR. GOETTL: My oldest daughter is Michelle. Then there is Marie, John, Terry, Dan, Glen, Lorrie and Larry is the youngest.

MS. NORTON: What are they all doing now? Is there anything that you'd like to share about that?

MR. GOETTL: They are spread all over the area here, except Marie; she lives in San Francisco. "Mickey" [Michelle] has her business down in the Burnsville Center. It's called A Touch of Country. Marie works for a tennis club out in San Francisco. John works for the University of Minnesota. Terry is a commercial painter. He paints buildings, but not houses. He's working on Best Buy right now. Dan is a mechanic. Glen is a carpenter. Lorrie is a stay at home mother. And my youngest boy Larry does cement work on high-rise buildings.

MS. NORTON: Okay; now we'll go on to your career Jim. Why did you want to work for FWS?

MR. GOETTL: Well, I spent a little over nine years in private work as a land surveyor. Then in 1962 the work was getting so slow we were starting to miss a lot of time. With eight kids, I needed something where I worked every day. Ralph Solfield and Curt Wilhelm both worked for FWS. I had worked with both of them in private work. So really, I needed a job. I had a job but I wanted to get into something more secure. I went over and applied and they hired me.

MS. NORTON: What were the pay and benefits like when you were hired?

MR. GOETTL: The benefits were good, but the pay wasn't very good! I remember that I started at \$4,400.00 a year. I was making about \$5,800.00 a year in private work. So I took a little cut in pay when I went to work for the government. But the benefits were there. We were getting paid every two weeks, which was what I wanted.

MS. NORTON: So the FWS was your first professional job with a state or the federal government?

MR. GOETTL: Right.

MS. NORTON: Where you hired in and worked out of the Region 3 office?

MR. GOETTL: Yes.

MS. NORTON: Did you always work just out of Region 3 even though you were out in the field a lot?

MR. GOETTL: Yes. I was in the field about sixty percent of the time, but it was always out of Region 3.

MS. NORTON: Did you have opportunities for promotions?

MR. GOETTL: Yeah. I started as a GS-5. I was promoted up to a GS-11 by the time I retired. I was offered other employment in Boston and down in Atlanta, which I turned down. It was too much for me to move with all of that family!

MS. NORTON: How did your career affect your family?

MR. GOETTL: At first the traveling was kind of hard; being gone so much. But then everybody just got used to it, and it worked out good.

MS. NORTON: That's good. Why did you leave the Service?

MR. GOETTL: I retired, that's why I left!

MS. NORTON: And you were a land surveyor when you retired?

MR. GOETTL: Right.

MS. NORTON: What kind of training did you receive for your jobs after you were hired by FWS?

MR. GOETTL: Most of it was in the field training. But there was courses that we could take through the mail. What they had on land surveying was when they started putting in the courses in the university that you had to have now, in order to become registered. They would grandfather us in if we had over twelve years of experience. Then you were eligible to take the land surveyors examination, which would be just like a degree. I did this. I was registered in five states.

MS. NORTON: What hours did you work?

MR. GOETTL: Basically from 7:00am to 3:30pm.

MS. NORTON: What were your day-to-day duties?

MR. GOETTL: They were land surveying. I was surveying the boundaries on national wildlife refuges and hatcheries, the wetlands.

MS. NORTON: What kind of tools or instruments did you use?

MR. GOETTL: We started out using the transit and chains. By the time I got to retiring we were using the theodolites and the satellites. We use those on our instruments so it's really gone a long ways from when I started.

MS. NORTON: Did you witness any new Service inventions or innovations?

MR. GOETTL: No, not really.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever work with animals?

MR. GOETTL: Oh yeah, we worked with animals in different refuges. We were there basically to survey, but if they needed help on the refuges we would still lend a hand.

Years ago I used to help on the swan counting out at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. We'd catch them and bring them in so John Ellis could sex them.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel toward the animals?

MR. GOETTL: I liked the animals.

MS. NORTON: What kind of support did you receive locally, regionally, federally for the work that you were doing?

MR. GOETTL: We received pretty good support. In the beginning it wasn't too good because it costs money to survey lands. Of course, nobody wanted to spend any money. They wanted the survey, but they didn't want to spend the money. But we educated them that surveying is a positive thing. It's something that you have to do!

MS. NORTON: How was the Service perceived by people outside of the agency?

MR. GOETTL: Generally good.

MS. NORTON: What projects were you ever involved in?

MR. GOETTL: Oh, there were quite a few refuges. I started the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and I started the Muscatatuck. I think I worked on just about every refuge in Region 3 in my time there.

MS. NORTON: Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

MR. GOETTL: Oh yeah, there were things like at Muscatatuck; where the Fish and Wildlife was not very popular. It was kind of hard working down there because the people were..well, they just didn't like us. It was kind of hard to keep people working. There were folks would quit before they'd go down there and work. It did have its problems once in a while.

MS. NORTON: How were these issues resolved?

MR. GOETTL: Just through time; people would seem to realize that we weren't all bad. They'd come around and like us, or kind of like us.

MS. NORTON: Would you consider that this was the most pressing issue you had to work with?

MR. GOETTL: Well, outside of the job itself of surveying property, every piece is different. It's knowledge and experience that you have to have to do it.

MR. NORTON: Has your perspective or opinion on that issue changed with time?

MR. GOETTL: No, I think it's about the same. I like the FWS and most of the people I worked with liked it to.

MS. NORTON: Who were your supervisors?

MR. GOETTL: John Umberger was the head of Engineering. Frank Hemmings was the head of Surveying. This was back in the early 1960s. When Hemmings retired, Ralph Soffield became the chief surveyor. Then Ralph passed away and we got Bruce Mortensen became the surveyor and then Kurt Wilhelm. After Kurt retired, I became the chief surveyor.

MS. NORTON: Good! It's kind of nice to be your own supervisor isn't it?

MR. GOETTL: Yeah, after it took me long enough!

MS. NORTON: Who were some of the individuals who helped shape your career?

MR. GOETTL: Oh, let's see. It's kind of hard to name just one. I was treated pretty decent by all of the people. I don't know if I can name any one individual down there.

MS. NORTON: So you all sort of became just like a team?

MR. GOETTL: Yeah. The majority of the time, you could go and talk to anybody. I never had any real problems that way. I could go in and talk to them and we could resolve any issue. I don't want to name any one person, but they were all pretty decent. I can put it that way.

MS. NORTON: That's great! Who were some of the people that you knew outside of the Service? Would they have been able to work for FWS?

MR. GOETTL: I don't really know.

MS. NORTON: Do you remember what Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior or Directors of FWS that you served under during your career?

MR. GOETTL: There was Mr. Burwell. After him, there was a guy from Texas. I can't remember his name. It was when they had that rift, when they reorganized. It was Trav Roberts. I liked him. He was what I call "quiet honest". If he had something to say, he told you. After him, I should remember them. There was Hemphill, Rickman, Marler, Harvey Nelson and Gritman.

MS. NORTON: How did changes in administrations affect your work?

MR. GOETTL: Not too much because our work was pretty well cut and dried. It was cut and dried, what we had to do, no matter who was in the administration. The only thing would be funding. That seemed to be a problem sometimes.

MS. NORTON: In your opinion, who were the individuals who shaped the Service?

MR. GOETTL: I don't know if I could answer that. That's getting kind of "above" me, I think, to try and determine that.

MS. NORTON: What was the high point of your career? Did you get any special awards or recognition?

MR. GOETTL: That's a hard one. I got a couple different awards for different projects that we did. It was more or less being nice for what you did. There was no real big thing.

MS. NORTON: What was the low point in your career?

MR. GOETTL: I don't know if I had any real low points.

MS. NORTON: That's even better!

MR. GOETTL: Yeah, everybody has low points, but I stay away from that! I'm not much for [dwelling on them].

MS. NORTON: You're smart Jim! Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience when you were working?

MR. GOETTL: Oh, we had people who threatened us. I was walked a quarter mile one time with a shotgun on my back! The fellow didn't want me on his property up in Jamestown, North Dakota. At Muscatatuck we were threatened quite a bit. We were even... one time a guy tried to run over us with his pick up truck. We had to run up a bank. That kind of kept you on your toes when you were working down there. Up in Sterns County it was hard. We used to get some of your people [Law Enforcement] to help us when we worked out there once in a while. We'd have to get some U. S. Marshals out there because there was people threatening to go home and get their rifles and shoot us, which never happened.

MS. NORTON: What was your most humorous experience?



MR. GOETTL: I don't know if I could tell you any of those! I can't really think of too many. There was a lot of things that went on, but I can't really think of anything right now.

MR. NORTON: What would you like to tell others about your career and FWS?

MR. GOETTL: I always speaking very highly of the FWS. Like I say, I enjoyed the people and working there. It was a good breed of people. I got along with them good, and I liked them. I would recommend it to anybody who was looking for a career in the wildlife. That would be the place to go.

MS. NORTON: What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service; like in the personnel or in the work environment?

MR. GOETTL: One thing I learned about working in the government, or any government agency is that it kind of goes in a big circle. You seem to go through a phase where they are either reorganizing or changing something. In our case, they used to go putting the surveys out to the private industry and then they'd realize that it was very expensive. Then it would rotate back to where you could hire them in again and do surveys in-house. Then you'd get someone new running it and they decide it should go back the other way. It was kind of a circle. And when you saw it coming you said, 'well, just let her come'.

MS. NORTON: What are your thoughts on the future? Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade?

MR. GOETTL: I imagine they are going to keep right on doing good. I don't like to stick politics in it, but lets see if we can get a decent administration in next time and I think it might change. Right now I think its....I don't keep up with it that much, but I would imagine that with this administration the FWS is hurting.

MS. NORTON: You're probably right. Who else do you think we should interview?

MR. GOETTL: I think you said you had Kurt Wilhelm on the list. Otherwise, all of the people that I worked with are not in the area here.

MS. NORTON: We are going to try as many as we can. It doesn't matter if you were a janitor, sweeping out at refuges or cleaning the pens at refuges or fish hatcheries; we're going to get as many of you as we can. I want to thank you very much Jim. I appreciated your cooperation. It was very good to see you again!

MR. GOETTL: Yeah, and thank you very much for coming out!

